

Message Text

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SUBJECT: DONT' GET SICK IN QUEBEC*

1. A POTENTIALLY CRUCIAL STRUGGLE FOR P.Q. IS NOW TAKING FORM IN QUEBEC. PRINCIPAL PLAYERS ARE REPRESENTATIVES OF PUBLIC AND PARA PUBLIC EMPLOYEE UNIONS ARE ONE SIDE AND GOQ MINISTER OF LABOR, PIERRE-MARC JOHNSON ON THE OTHER. AT IMMEDIATE ISSUE IS QUESTION OF WHO WILL DEFINE "ESSENTIAL PUBLIC SERVICES." WHICH MUST BE MAINTAINED DURING A STRIKE. IT WILL BE RECALLED THAT FAILURE TO END THE DRAWNOUT SERIES OF STRIKES WHICH DISRUPTED HOSPITAL SERVICES AND SCHOOLS IN 1975-76 WAS A MAJOR FACTOR IN THE DOWNFALL OF THE PREVIOUS LIBERAL GOVERNMENT. PEQUISTES ARE WELL AWARE OF THEIR OWN VULNERABILITY IN THIS DOMAIN AS IMPORTANT LABOR AGREEMENTS IN PUBLIC SECTOR APPROACH THEIR TERM.

2. FIRST TEST OF PQ'S ABILITY TO DEAL WITH TOUGH, COCKY UNION LEADERS IS OVER DEFINITION OF ESSENTIAL SERVICES IN HOSPITALS. THE UNIONS INST THAT ONLY THEIR MEMBERS SHOULD DEFINE SUCH SERVICES. OTHERWISE, THEIR RIGHT TO EFFECTIVE COLLECTIVE BARGAINING WILL BE INFRINGED, THEY CLAIM.
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HOSPITAL ADMINISTRATORS AND DOCTORS, RECALLING CONDITIONS WHICH FORCED MANY HOSPITALS TO SEND SERIOUSLY ILL PATIENTS HOME IN 1976, QUESTION UNION'S SENSE OF RESPONSIBILITY AND REJECT ITS MEMBER'S COMPETENCE TO MAKE MEDICAL JUDGEMENTS. 3. MINISTER JOHNSON IS ATTEMPTING WALK DANGEROUS MIDDLE LINE. HE IS PROPOSING LEGISLATION WHICH WOULD ALLOW UNIONS IN FIRST INSTANCE TO DEFINE

"ESSENTIAL SERVICES" WHERE DISPUTE OVER DEFINITION WITH HOSPITAL MANAGEMENT EXISTS. SHOULD DISPUTE PERSIST, JOHNSON WISHES CREATE SPECIAL LABOR COURT WHICH WOULD INVESTIGATE AND ATTEMPT ARBITRATE. IF UNION REJECTED SUCH ARBITRATION AND ESSENTIAL SERVICE AS DEFINED BY COURT WERE THREATENED, GOQ WOULD ASSUME POWER PROHIBIT STRIKE.

4. COMMENT: LONG SUFFERING QUEBEC PUBLIC HAS FINALLY HAD ENOUGH. THEY ARE FED UP WITH THREATS POSED BY EXAGGERATED DEMANDS OF PUBLIC SECTOR WORKERS IN SOCIETY'S TWO MOST SENSITIVE AREAS, I E THE CARE OF THE SICK AND THE EDUCATION OF CHILDREN. THEY LOOK TO THE PQ GOVERNMENT TO FULFILL ITS ELECTION PROMISE TO PREVENT REPETITION OF THE CRIPPLING DISRUPTIONS CAUSED BY FREQUENT STRIKES OF LONG DURATION. HOWEVER, SOLVING THE PUBLIC SECTOR PROBLEM BY GRANTING HEAVY WAGE INCREASES OR OTHER COSTLY CONCESSIONS TO A GROUP WHO ARE ALREADY VIEWED AS OVER PRIVILEGED AS LIBERAL GOVERNMENT DID IN 1976 WOULD ALSO BE UNACCEPTABLE TO MOST VOTERS. THUS, JOHNSON FACES THE FORMIDABLE TASK OF FINDING A FORMULA ACCEPTABLE TO ALL BEFORE NEW CONTRACT NEGOTIATIONS BEGIN NEXT YEAR. NEEDLESS TO SAY, HE IS WELL AWARE THAT HIS GOVERNMENT'S FATE MAY DEPEND TO A GREAT EXTENT ON HIS SUCCESS IN BRINGING INDUSTRIAL PEACE TO A TRADITIONALLY TROUBLED SECTOR OF QUEBEC SOCIETY AT NO COST TO THE VOTER. MCNAMARA

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